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061239Z Apr 05

UNCLAS ABU DHABI 001551

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPT FOR G, G/TIP, INL, DRL, PRM, NEA/RA, AND NEA/ARPI
STATE ALSO PASS TO USTR

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: UPTICK IN UNDERAGE CAMEL JOCKEY REPATRIATION

REF: ABU DHABI 1523

11. (U) Summary: In the three weeks since the UAEG announced that a new law banning underage camel jockeys would take effect March 31, a small but growing number of children from TIP source countries (especially Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sudan) have been "rescued" from their captors and are now either being processed by their embassies and consulates, temporarily housed in Abu Dhabi's new rehabilitation center for ex-camel jockeys, or repatriated to their countries of origin. Source country embassies report generally good cooperation with the UAEG in processing and repatriating the children) even though the numbers being rescued are small compared to the estimated 2,700 to 9,000 underage camel jockeys in the UAE. End Summary.

12. (SBU) Since it opened its doors in December, the UAEG's rehabilitation center in Abu Dhabi emirate has sheltered a total of 68 children to date, 43 of whom have been repatriated, mostly to Pakistan, according to a Ministry of Interior contact. Separately, the Embassy of Pakistan said that its consulates in Abu Dhabi and Dubai have handled approximately 40 cases involving underage camel jockeys in the past three weeks. Half of these have been repatriated to Pakistan while the other half are still in the UAE waiting for their travel documents to be processed. Some of the children are coming in with their parents, others with their sponsors. Most are issued one-time travel documents. The Government of Pakistan has been using the media and NGO's in Pakistan to attempt to reunite the children with their families. Children whose family ties cannot be established are cared for by a chain of "SOS Villages" in Pakistan. While most of the source country embassies and consulates Pol Chief contacted reported generally good cooperation with UAE officials, a Pakistani diplomat said that the Abu Dhabi Police colonel who had been given overall responsibility for the repatriation campaign had not received formal instructions from the Ministry of Interior to work on any cases. (Note: As noted reftel, federal Cabinet approval of the new law is expected at its next meeting on Monday, April 11.)

13. (SBU) With heightened interest in Pakistan about the plight of underage Pakistani children working as camel jockeys in the UAE, the Minister for Overseas Pakistanis is planning to visit the UAE later this month to coordinate with the UAEG on repatriation, according to the Embassy of Pakistan. The Pakistani minister is also keen on setting up a center in Pakistan for children who have no recollection of their families.

14. (SBU) The Ambassador from Bangladesh told Pol Chief that the Bangladeshi consulate in Dubai had received a half-dozen inquiries from sponsors of trafficked children in the past week. He estimated the number of Bangladeshi children currently in the UAE working as camel jockeys in the hundreds. One of the problems he is anticipating includes verification of the children's nationalities. "We have to use our intuition in some cases. We pay close attention to their accent to tell if they are from Bangladesh," he said. A Sudanese diplomat told Pol Chief that the number of ex-camel jockeys coming to the Embassy with their parents has been increasing daily this week, although he did not have precise figures. The Sudanese Embassy has been issuing travel documents to permit them to go home to Sudan. The Somali Ambassador told Pol Chief that the UAEG has not provided him with any proof that Somali children were in the UAE working as camel jockeys, making it difficult for him to help. Once he has the information, he said he will do everything to help the children just as he did two years ago when he learned that 10-year-old and 6-year-old brothers from Somaliland had been smuggled to the UAE to be used as camel jockeys.
ALBRIGHT